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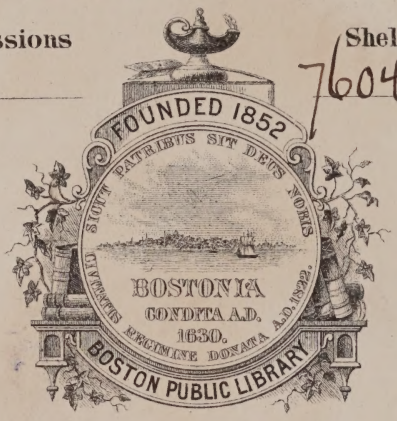

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THE PHILOSOPHY

OF A

FUTURE STATE.

A BRIEF DEMONSTRATION

OF THE

Untenability of Current Speculations.

BY

C. DAVIS ENGLISH.

—1885.—
EDWARD STERN & CO.,
125 and 127 N. Seventh St., Philadelphia.

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The Philosophy of a Future State.

The crass and illogical interpretations, followed by misdirected diatribes against the materialistic tendencies of modern scientific investigation, offer in themselves sufficient excuse for another contribution to the already overcrowded literature of this subject. The design, therefore, of the present essay is to briefly indicate the illegitimate and legitimate conclusions to be drawn from the results, more particularly of mental physiology and psychology in relation to a future state. For it is obvious that the basis of all considerations of future life, and its speculative or apocalyptic conditions, is the belief in the continuance of our "living nature" after physical dissolution; and thus it becomes of the utmost importance to ascertain what bearings the recent developments of these sciences have upon the following questions, the first so old:

(1). Is mind a mere differentiation of matter and force, and consequently does it not survive the body? or, (2). Whether, *being* of a superior and more subtle nature, its survival would be in any way anthropomorphic in psychical character or attribute—in other words, representable in thought?

First then, if it be shown that mind and body are connected, dependent, and mutually interactive, can it be inferred that mind has no existence apart from body? Is it logical to deduce from such premises the

conclusion that mind is evolved from matter? We shall presently see why not. Though no doubt cumulative, this kind of evidence is inconclusive. Noting *in limine*, that no supported claim is made by materialism to offer more than a tentative and supposititious, not to say crude, *rationale* of the acts of mind in terms of matter, and that until this is effected, mind is not precluded as a distinct entity; noting this, we say, on the threshold, let us take a very rapid survey of the relationship actually ascertained. In technical language, let us look at the results of *à posteriori* investigation. As stated by an extreme materialist, the late Professor Clifford, the results are "that not only some change in the matter of this organ (brain) is the invariable antecedent, but that some other change is the invariable concomitant of sensation, thought, and emotion." ("Lectures and Essays," vol. ii., p. 37.) Quotations innumerable might be made from almost innumerable writers, but generalization rather than complex qualification is my purpose; moreover, this statement of Professor Clifford's is so happily comprehensive as to cover a vast amount of detail in a few words. The highest flights of reason, it has been shown, require that the cerebrum shall properly discharge its functions, as well as do the actions of our general nervous system demand physiological and molecular change. We have no less an authority than Dr. W. B. Carpenter for the fact that even our wills, whose powers it is the wont so much to sublimate, can act only by "the intensification of the hyperæmic state of the ideational centre," that is, by an increased flow of blood to that part of the brain (wherever it may be) which is used in the

production of ideas. In short, it has been satisfactorily shown that whenever and wherever mind is in action, then and there matter is in action. Truly, then, it is no great wonder that so many great and powerful intellects have been overwhelmed by such a mass of apparently conclusive evidence, and have denied absolutely an immaterial or psychical *ego*. Too much absorbed in the contemplation of their own case they have failed to understand its proper relation to that of their opponents, and committed the fatal error of what the logicians call the *ignoratio elenchi*—ignorance of the proof of the contradictory. For the spiritualists (using the term as contradistinguished from materialists) assuming the existence of an immaterial personal *ego*, whose purpose, so to speak, in incarnation and localization was communion with things physical, *necessarily* would hold a mutuality of action and reaction. "Surely, then," they say to the materialist, "it is no proof of the non-existence of such an *ego* as we contend for, that mind and body interact with great subtlety and precision." *Assuming* the existence of a mind, which in some mysterious fashion becomes locate in body with the object of effecting an intercourse with the physical world; it would follow on evolutionary principles that the human being (thus resulting) which possessed the most perfect interaction—which possessed a mind and body both most sensitively adjusted each to the other—would survive the one less perfect in its adjustment, and as a consequence have more offspring. This is actually the case, leaving out the assumption. But unfortunately it is the assumption which vitiates the entire reasoning;

the scientific evidences of the existence of a super-physical entity being so meagre, as to involve the argument in the worse kind of a begging of the question. Thus valuable as both spiritualism and materialism are as working hypotheses for the discovery of new facts, they appear in ultimate analysis superlatively inconclusive, unpractical and erroneous. Both, however, contain a "spirit of truth," and at the same time furnish the premises of the conclusion which it is the chief purpose of this paper to indicate. This conclusion presents itself as an answer to our second question.

(2). Whether being of a superior and more subtle nature, its survival would be in any way anthropomorphic—in other words, representable in thought?

To anticipate our conclusion, for the sake of perspicuousness, we may categorically answer, no. Even admitting (and this we are unconcerned to deny) that the soul, or *ego*, or personality, or super-physical being, does survive the body, it must be completely unthinkable, and all ideas of it pseudo-ideas. Doubtless this will be considered by an eternally watchful orthodoxy, jumping out of the materialistic frying pan into the fires of the *Inferno* itself. But let us hasten on.

The proof of this requires the establishment of two propositions. *First*, That this future existence must have *consciousness* predicated of it, else it is inconceivable as a personality; and, *Second*, That consciousness cannot be so predicated of it, either as substance or attribute.

The first of these propositions needs, I think, but presentation for its instant acceptance, and is here mentioned only for argumentative symmetry. If it were

contended that consciousness is not the pre-requisite of the *ego's* future state, there would arise the necessity of imagining an *ego* without phenomenal or conceivable actuality. To deprive one of corporeity by physical death, and of consciousness by hypothesis, would offer a residuary nonentity—a state unknowable, unthinkable, and inconceivable. The first of our propositions, therefore, its alternate being such as it is, may with safety be assumed, without further demonstration.

The second, however, is neither so facile in presentation, nor so readily susceptible of easy comprehension.

In denying the survival of consciousness after death, I use the term consciousness in its widest significance, including the recognition of all relation subjective and objective; and by subjective is meant all that belongs to and proceeds from that which thinks—objective meaning contrariwise, all that forms the matter or object of thought. A clearer idea of consciousness too is desirable. "Consciousness," says Sir William Hamilton, "is the recognition by the mind or *ego* of its acts or affections. * * * Consciousness then expresses a relation between two terms." It must exist under one of three forms. (*a*) The recognition of the objective as acting on the subjective, called sensation or feeling; (*b*) The recognition of the objective as acting on the objective, called perception; and, (*c*) The recognition of purely subjective states or actions, called thought or reasoning. All mental phenomena being reducible to one of these categories, and all other conscious potentialities being not only unknown but unknownable, our position must be admitted as established, by the demonstration of the

impossibility of all or any of these three modes accompanying the *ego* in its transition from earth to heaven.

(*a*) Is there any, even the remotest, justification for saying that the *ego* will retain its power of recognizing the objective as acting on the subjective? To illustrate. In "the world to come" there may or may not be variations of heat and cold, if there are not then of course the soul could not be conscious of them, but if there are we are tossed on to the other horn of the dilemma when asked to explain how such variations are to be felt. In order to keep as far as possible from materialism, the *ego*, by supposition, has first nothing to be affected by material changes; and, secondly, no senses which are the only known means of communication with the external world. Making as general a reduction as possible, it may be said that in its super-physical state, it knows (for the same reason as before) neither pressure nor resistance, and for such an *ego* the external world is as much a myth as the most ardent disciple of Bishop Berkely could ever have wished. The fact of sentiency, however, not being an attribute of the soul in futurity, is best shown by reference to the belief that most sane persons hold in regard to the absolute annihilation of the lower animal creation at death. Few, for example, would have the temerity to suggest that in a tadpole there was a "surviving something" which effected a continuation of sentiency after death. Yet this is just what those who believe in the sentiency of the human soul after death suggest. For human sentiency differs only in degree from that of a tadpole, and is only the result of a higher nervous evolution. In the first and lowest category of

consciousness, then, it must be confessed that the prospect is not encouraging.

(*b*) This phase of conscious manifestation is concerned with the recognition of the objective in relation to the objective. If my organs of sight are injured or their functions obstructed, does my mind or ultimate entity which is to survive my body substitute other means of vision? If my nerves of hearing refuse to transmit the waves of sound to the proper centre, does my soul remain deaf or hear without such paltry things as nerves? To ask these questions is to answer them. Not so, however, when all the functions are hushed, not so when all these senses sleep the sleep of death. Then there are many would have us sing the praises of the "escaped soul" now disporting in its fullest glory; about which soul it were rank madness to suggest the want of consciousness. With a reckless disregard of all that's rational we are asked to believe in function without organ; end without means! Not only is there not a scintilla of evidence of the possibility of such a condition, but the most chimerical mind that ever was, is now, or ever shall be, cannot conceive it without unconsciously substituting a spiritual set of senses for a physical.

(*c*) The third division of our subject has to do, it will be remembered, with the purely subjective—with the consciousness manifesting itself in thought and reason, and having for its subject matter only ideas and the relations between ideas. Here it is that the advocates of a future consciousness concentrate all their forces; driven by an inexorable logic from frontier strongholds, they retreat to the citadel of their metro-

polis, thinking,—alas, how vainly:—that now they are hedged about by the impenetrable walls of "pure ideas."

Closely connected as this phase of consciousness, at first glance, appears with the theory of innate ideas, the connection proves, for the purposes of my argument, unimportant; because, in the first place, it is now conceded that experience is the *occasion*, if not the *cause* of the manifestation of the so-called intuitive ideas; secondly, this *occasion* for the potentiality passing into actuality is all I am concerned to deny.

None will deny that not only every observation of the phenomena, but every step in the reasoning, resulting in the discovery that every particle of matter attracts every other particle of matter, directly as the mass, and inversely as the square of the distance, was impossible, except through the instrumentality of brain. Nor is it likely any one will assert that a Plato could have philosophized, a Shakespeare could have written, or a Washington could have conquered by other means. These highest types of consciousness, all will agree, could not have been, had either organ or function been imperfect. But with thaumaturgical inconsistency, the souls or *egos* of these men, nine people out of ten will say, retain a consciousness similar, not to say identical, with that of earth. The ideation, the pure thought, it will be contended, still continues. But let us, for the sake of argument, allow the retention of the ability to recognize the subjective—a sort of psychical process, analogous to cerebration. Now if our reasoning hitherto has been correct, we can not also attribute to this consciousness the power of recognizing the relations (*a*) and (*b*), sensa-

tion and perception, and therefore its entire food for thought must be already in it, its entire content already supplied. In addition to this, let me remind the reader that the most refined intellectual pabulum is only the abstraction of that primarily furnished through the *media* of the senses—recalling all this, and what bathos there is in giving a mundane consciousness to a supramundane being. It could only combine and recombine a set of utterly useless ideas. If asked, "Why, useless?" the reply is that our ideas are relative to a physical condition and environment, but on the supposition of a superphysical soul surviving, these conditions and environments must be radically changed, if not annihilated. Thus, consciousness, supposing it to survive, would be quite useless, in fact, very much in the way.

But then, if we admit, as we have thus done, the conceivability of the power of retaining a purely subjective consciousness, we are met by the familiar and awkward metaphysical question: How (if the prerequisite of consciousness is the antithesis of subject and object) can the subject be conscious of itself, without being its own object? It cannot, however, be its own object, and therefore something else must be the object, which the subject has all along supposed was itself, or else the subject must be the object of still another personality.

One objection must be met, because of its *prima facie* importance. It is that consciousness may exist in analogy to a force, and that it is no proof of the annihilation of a force to demonstrate the annihilation of the conduits or *media*, through which it can phenomenally

exert itself. It will be said that to infer, for instance, the annihilation of electricity, from the destruction of the means of its generation and conduction, were eminently paralogical. So, it will be said, consciousness may be capable of exerting itself by other than the known physiological conjunctions. Objections like this only remove the difficulty a step, and this one is open to the charge of double inconsistency. In the first place a latent consciousness with potential manifestation only upon suitable material and psychical conjunctions, would be like the unfortunate *Strephon* in "Iolanthe," a sort of hybrid, immortal down to the waist only. But the speciousness of this objection is susceptible of even better exposure. Consciousness (if super-physical) must always be conscious; it cannot, like electricity and other forces be in abeyance, *in nubibus*, as the old lawyers used to say, for during such suppression it must be conscious. In other words, there is here presented a consciousness, at one and the same time, conscious and not conscious —a contradiction in terms.

A common fact in mental physiology, belonging to that class of phenomena, which are reckoned unimportant in direct ratio to their obviousness, has a testimony to offer countenancing those views if not immediately corroborating them. On the supposition of consciousness, being independent of body in at least the third and highest sphere of action, it would certainly seem to follow that in cases of profound sleep and suspended animation the *ego* would retain the power, which is thus independent, and which is to accompany it on final dissolution. Although, on this supposition, shut off from exter-

nal impressions and affections, it would yet be capable of saying to itself and with Descartes, *cogito* (that is pure *cogitatio*), *ergo* sum. But who has found this to be true —to have been confirmed by his own experience? The coma of inanition, the death like syncope, the instant inanimateness consequent upon a violent concussion, all attest an utter unconsciousness, not a partial one; and to conceive of a person in any of these or similar states retaining, say, consciousness of himself as himself, would be a decided *excursus* into the region of chimera.

Let me add one more thought. Many experience difficulty, if in fact they can at all succeed, in thinking away consciousness from the *ego* when it dies from earth. The annihilation of matter, they contend, is one thing, but the annihilation of a psychical, immaterial consciousness, quite another. Though not generally a satisfactory method of reply, that of answering one question by another, is here both satisfactory and brief. The interrogative reply then is—how was this consciousness first created? For if not created it must have existed for ever, therefore we should have some recollection of our previous conditions. This seems to result in a sort of Platonic metempsychosis. The idea of the annihilation of consciousness presents no greater difficulties than its creation—neither being explicable.

As a summary of results, as well as to preclude the possibility of misconstruction, let me reiterate what has more than once been stated in the foregoing discussion. While opposed to that school who would synonymize mind with matter, I yet confess that the evidences of the future existence retaining anything like a consciousness

as we know it are too exiguous to justify the attribution of consciousness to such existence. Rather such evidences as we have all point in an opposite direction. That this is not equivalent to denial of a future existence of some kind hardly requires insistence. On the vast subject complete agnosticism is the position assumed. We can, if we choose, indulge such fanciful speculations in regard to a future state, as used to agonize the schoolmen in their calculations as to the number of angels for whose dancing the point of a needle would furnish space; but they have no right to be placed as bases for creeds. If a future state awaits us, it far transcends our finite apprehensions, in substance, form, or attribute; let us then stand abashed confessing our intellectual limitations, not with the presumption of fools, cry out that we know the unknowable, think the unthinkable, and conceive the inconceivable.

The views expressed in this paper I fully recognize as iconoclastic in the extreme, and their religious implications will be denounced as shocking. In spite of frequent protestation, some will call this a new materialism, others possibly a subtle pantheism, while some will not stop short of stigmatizing it as atheism. If my views, conscientiously arrived at, are irreconcilable with current theology, it is surely a misfortune rather than a fault, and the following words of one of the profoundest and most eloquent writers of modern times may be my plea for utterance: "Whoever hesitates," says Herbert Spencer, "to utter that which he thinks the highest truth, lest it should be too much in advance of the time, may reassure himself by looking at his facts from an

impersonal point of view. Let him duly realize the fact that opinion is the agency through which character adapts external arrangements to itself—that his opinion rightly forms part of this agency—is a unit of force, constituting, with other such units, the general power which works out social changes; and he will perceive that he may properly give full utterance to his innermost conviction; leaving it to produce what effect it may. It is not for nothing that he has in him these sympathies with some principles and repugnance to others. He, with all his capacities, and aspirations and beliefs, is not an accident, but a product of the time. He must remember that while he is a descendant of the past, he is a parent of the future; and that his thoughts are as children born to him, which he may not carelessly let die. . . . . Not as adventitious, therefore, will the wise man regard the faith that is in him. The highest truth he sees he will fearlessly utter; knowing that, let what may come of it, he is thus playing his right part in the world—knowing that if he can effect the change he aims at—well; if not—well also, but not *so* well." If asked to characterize broadly the difference between the thought of to-day and that of a few hundred years ago, one might say that, then it was an endeavor to shape science and philosophy to theology; now the endeavor to shape theology to science and philosophy.

Much might be said upon the influence the establishment of such negative beliefs would have upon practical ethics, but this would involve us in the voluminous discussion of the value of a system of rewards and

punishments not based upon golden streets and sulphurous caverns. Let us take the advice of Hume and resist collateral issues and amplification. "In all abstract reasonings," says this monitor, "there is one point of view, which, if we can happily hit, we shall go farther towards illustrating the subject, than by all the eloquence and copious expression in the world. This point of view we should endeavor to reach, and reserve the flowers of rhetoric for subjects, which are more adapted to them." I shall be satisfied, therefore, if I have so collected some scattered rays as to focus a new phase of an old subject.